

# *14 April 2006*

## *Good Friday*

### READINGS

Psalm 22; Lamentations 3:1-9,19-33; I Peter 1:10-20; Mark 15:22-39

### DEVOTION

“When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land...” Mark 15:33

The 25th of March 2003,...I was in the Iraqi desert just outside An Najaf. My battalion had stopped for a few days, waiting for the roads to clear before we continued north toward Baghdad. A few NCOs and I were standing outside in mid-afternoon, using humvee hoods as tables for our dinner plates. We were tired, and just enjoying a few minutes of quiet as we discussed the day’s activities.

As we talked I looked behind them and across the desert about two miles away, I could see a wall of sand and rain moving swiftly in our direction. It filled the entire horizon. At the top, angry black clouds flashed with lightning. Below the clouds the air boiled red as the sand swirled mercilessly.

We dove for our tents, just as the storm hit. Immediately, everything was pitch black. The high winds whipped the tent flaps. Soon, it started raining, **mud**, as the storm water poured down through the whirling sand. The storm lasted about 30 minutes, then moved on leaving a dark red sky in its wake. An Iraqi “shamal” is terrifying, and we had just experienced one first hand.

As I reflect back on that day, the way a normal, bright afternoon so quickly converted to darkness and raging winds, it occurs to me the afternoon of Jesus’ crucifixion must have been like this. As our Lord hung on the cross and cried out his last words, the sun was blotted out, and the curtain in the temple was torn. I can see it. I can feel the terror of the disciples, the frantic questions: “Is the world ending?” “Is God so angry with us that he has decided to blot us off the face of the earth?”

This is “**Good** Friday” precisely because it was not in God’s plan to blot us off the face of the earth. It is the day our new lives began. Don’t be tempted to look ahead to Easter, and say “It’s okay, I know that on the third day Christ arose.” That is a cop-out! The pain and anguish of our Lord, the fear and grief of the disciples... you and I must feel this with them to fully appreciate the meaning of this weekend. It wasn’t Christ’s resurrection that saved us, it was his **death**. God sent his Son to live with us, walk the earth with us, hurt with us, and DIE a truly horrible death for us. It was a dark day. It was a terrifying day. And a truly **good** one for you and for me.

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